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ABSTRACT

An assessment of the review process for selection of documents for inclusion in the Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation of the Educational Research Information Center (ERIC/TM) is presented. The review process is used to cull irrelevant or technically flawed material from the over 1,500 acquired documents. The clearinghouse, which is one of the 16 specialized clearinghouses in the ERIC system, acquires, selects, processes, and announces approximately 750 published articles and 800 unpublished documents each year. To date, approximately 14% of the reviewed documents have been rejected and 38% transferred to other clearinghouses. Major review criteria include relevance and timeliness, methodology, and effectiveness of presentation. This study was conducted during November and December of 1988; 17 measurement specialists acted as external reviewers of the ERIC/TM review process. Thirty documents were selected from among those reviewed previously by the clearinghouse; 20 of these were randomly selected from a group of documents that had been accepted since June 1988. In addition, 10 documents rejected since August 1988 were selected. The agreement rates between ERIC/TM and the external reviewers suggest that ERIC/TM is reviewing and accepting documents in a manner consistent with the expectations of the educational community. The ERIC/TM Document Review Form and an outline of review criteria are appended. (TJH)

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An Evaluation of ERIC/TM's Review Process

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

What Is ERIC/TM? 2

What Are ERIC/TM's Review Procedures? 3
- Relevance and Timeliness 3
- Methodology 3
- Effectiveness of Presentation 4
- Other Criteria 4

What Was the Method of ERIC/TM's Evaluation? 5

What Were the Results of the Evaluation? 6
- Inter-rater Agreement 6
- Document Agreement 7

Discussion and Conclusions 11
- The Inter-rater Agreement 11
- The Individual Document Agreement Rate 11
  - ERIC/TM accepts, external reviewers reject 12
  - ERIC/TM rejects, external reviewers accept 13
- Summary 15

References 17

Appendix A: ERIC/TM Document Review Form 18

Appendix B: ERIC/TM's Brief Description of Review Criteria 20

Introduction

As Rudner and Wise (1989) point out, vigilance in selecting documents for inclusion into the ERIC database is a major task of the Educational Research Information Center's Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation (ERIC/TM). ERIC/TM's review process is the method used to "weed out irrelevant or technically flawed material" from over 1,500 acquired documents (Rudner and Wise, 1988, p. 15). The process must be continually monitored by ERIC users to ensure its continued utility. This study addresses this need for monitoring by asking: **"How can ERIC/TM better serve its audience in terms of better selection of documents for inclusion into the ERIC database?"**

This paper reports the results of ERIC/TM's evaluation of its document review process. The study was conducted during November and December of 1988. This report details:

- what ERIC/TM is
- what ERIC/TM's document review procedures are
- the method of this evaluation
- the results of this evaluation
- conclusions from the evaluation

This evaluation replicates and extends an earlier evaluation of ERIC/TM's review process (Eissenberg & Rudner, 1988). Eissenberg and Rudner reported satisfactory results, but noted that ERIC/TM should be paying closer attention to methodology when judging documents and that documents not directly related to education should still be considered for inclusion in the ERIC database.

What Is ERIC/TM?

ERIC/TM is one of the 16 specialized clearinghouses in the ERIC system. ERIC clearinghouses are responsible for building a database of "fugitive" literature, a database of published articles, and synthesizing literature within their field of interest.

ERIC/TM acquires, selects, abstracts, processes, and announces approximately 750 published articles and 800 unpublished documents about to all aspects of educational testing, evaluation, measurement, and learning theory.

Articles and manuscripts selected for inclusion in the ERIC system have high visibility in the educational community. The full text of accepted non-journal documents are archived on microfiche and made available more than 800 locations. Abstracts of all accepted manuscripts can be searched through major online information retrieval systems, such as Dialog, BRS, and SDC, and through CD-ROM systems, such as OCLC, and SilverPlatter. Abstracts are also published in *Resources in Education* or *Current Index to Journals in Education*, which are available in more than 2,500 libraries and information centers.

In developing the testing portion of the fugitive literature database, ERIC/TM acquires and reviews approximately 1500 unpublished articles annually. Documents outside the TM scope of interest are forwarded to the appropriate clearinghouse. ERIC/TM reviews documents within its scope, following the procedures described in the next section. To date, approximately 14% of the reviewed documents have been rejected and 38% transferred to other clearinghouses (Hannaman, 1989).

ERIC/TM undertook a self-evaluation in order to improve its services to the measurement and educational communities. ERIC/TM hopes that this evaluation, as well as future evaluations, will increase the already high quality of the ERIC database.

What Are ERIC/TM's Review Procedures?

After ERIC/TM receives and catalogs documents, the documents are handed to the Review Coordinator. The primary function of the Review Coordinator is to decide if ERIC/TM should

- accept and continue to process the document,
- reject the document, or
- transfer the document to another clearinghouse

This important decision is based on several clearly defined review criteria. These criteria are:

- relevance and timeliness
- methodology
- effectiveness of presentation

Relevance and Timeliness: ERIC/TM only accepts into the ERIC database documents that contribute new information to the field of educational measurement. If a particular document contributes to another field of education, ERIC/TM transfers it to the appropriate clearinghouse. When documents clearly do not contribute, ERIC/TM rejects them.

When judging a document's relevance and timeliness, we ask questions such as

Does the document address a concern of the measurement community?
Is the document on the edge of measurement research?
Does the document discuss a past measurement issue in a new light?

Methodology: We judge the methodology described in a document by examining the document's objectives,
research procedures, and
conclusions and recommendations.

ERIC/TM often judges research reports based on all three of these criteria. Other documents -- for example, position papers -- may contribute heavily in only one or two of these criteria.

Some questions that ERIC/TM asks when it reviews a document's contribution are:

Does the document meet its objectives?
Are the document's research procedures sound?
Are the conclusions justified?

Effectiveness of Presentation: ERIC/TM also judges documents based on their effectiveness of presentation. This criterion includes:

- clarity of language
- writing style
- audience
- cohesiveness

While presentation quality may vary, ERIC/TM strives to accept those documents that are clearly written and easy to follow.

Some questions ERIC/TM asks when judging the effectiveness of a document's presentation are:

Are terms clearly defined where necessary?
Are explanations in the document easy to understand?
Does the document address its audience?
Does the document flow logically?

Other Criteria Of course, these three major criteria are not the only criteria ERIC/TM uses when reviewing documents. It also examines each document for

- new applications of knowledge
- authority of the author
- thoroughness of reporting
- responsiveness to current priorities
- technical considerations

All of these criteria help ERIC/TM to achieve its goal of accepting only documents that benefit the many users of the ERIC system.

What Was the Method of ERIC/TM's Evaluation?

In November and December of 1988, ERIC/TM contacted 17 measurement specialists who agreed to help with the evaluation of the review process by being external reviewers. These 17 external reviewers included test designers, researchers, policy-makers, writers, publishers, and practitioners in the field of educational measurement. The external reviewers reviewed documents that ERIC/TM had already decided to accept or reject.

Because the evaluation was of the review process, ERIC/TM selected 30 documents from the documents that it had already reviewed. Of these 30 documents, 20 were randomly selected from a larger group of documents that had previously been accepted since June, 1988. ERIC/TM also randomly selected 10 documents from all documents that had been rejected since August, 1988. Most documents (62%) that came to ERIC/TM in 1988 were either accepted or rejected. (Hannaman, 1989). ERIC/TM **did not** select documents for this evaluation that had been transferred to other ERIC clearinghouses.

Once these 30 documents were selected, ERIC/TM randomly assigned each external reviewer between nine and 13 documents to review. Documents were assigned so that if every reviewer responded, each document would be reviewed by at least six external reviewers.

ERIC/TM sent each external reviewer

- the documents to review
- 12 document review forms (see Appendix A)
- a brief explanation of ERIC/TM review criteria (see Appendix B)

ERIC/TM included document review forms to help reviewers with their decision. These forms contain a rating scale for each of the three major selection criteria. Also, the document review forms provided space for reviewer comments, enabling ERIC/TM to better understand reviewer decisions. ERIC/TM explained that reviewers would be making only "accept" or "reject" decisions. The external reviewers were unaware of any previous review decision made by ERIC/TM.

What Were the Results of the Evaluation?

Of the 17 measurement specialists who agreed to participate, 11 responded with the results of their review. These results are reported in two levels of analysis

- Inter-rater agreement
- Document agreement and disagreement

Inter-rater Agreement: The individual results of the external reviewers are compared to ERIC/TM's review in Table 1. On the next page, Table 1 shows a 66% agreement rate between ERIC/TM and the external reviewers as a group. Individually, agreement rates ranged from a low of 34% to a high of 86%. Eissenberg and Rudner (1988) reported a 70% agreement rate, with a range of 63% to 88%.

Table 1: Comparison of internal ERIC/TM review decisions with decisions made by external reviewers.

	Decision Type				
	Agreement		Disagreement		
ERIC/TM Decision	Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject	
Ext. Reviewer	Accept	Reject	Reject	Accept	% Agreement
1	5	2	1	2	70%
2	6	2	1	1	80%
3	5	4	2	2	69%
4	5	3	2	1	72%
5	7	1	1	3	67%
6	5	3	3	1	67%
7	1	2	5	1	34%
8	7	2	1	2	75%
9	5	2	3	3	54%
10	4	2	4	2	50%
11	4	2	0	1	86%
Totals	54	25	23	18	66%

Document Agreement and Disagreement: On the next page, Table 2 shows the agreement rates for individual documents that ERIC/TM accepted. This table shows that there were only two instances in which all of the external reviewers of a document disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to accept that document (numbers 19 and 20). One of these two documents was reviewed by only one external reviewer. There were five instances in which all of the external reviewers of a document agreed with ERIC/TM's decision to accept the document (numbers 2, 3, 6, 10, and 18).

Table 2: Comparison of ERIC/TM's accepted documents with external review decisions

Short Titles of Documents ERIC/TM Accepted	Reviewer	External Reviewer Decisions 1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Nat'l high school grad. reqs.		Accept	Accept	Reject	Accept		
2. Gen'l cognitive operations		Accept	Accept				
3. Comparison of models in CAT		Accept	Accept	Accept			
4. Evaluation of PET		Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Reject
5. Impact of Governor's school		Accept	Accept	Reject	Accept		
6. Attitudes about ed. test formats		Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	
7. Critical thinking & curr. design		Reject	Reject	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
8. School and teacher effectiveness		Accept	Accept	Reject			
9. Eval. of SABIN demo. school		Accept	Accept	Reject			
10. Indicators of literacy		Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept		
11. Rel. & val. of behav. inventory		Reject	Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject	
12. Leadership assessment instrument		Accept	Reject	Accept	Accept		
13. Measuring health knowledge		Accept	Accept	Accept	Reject	Reject	Reject
14. ETV formative evaluation		Reject	Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject	
15. Modifying Stout's procedure		Reject	Reject	Accept			
16. Evaluating no pass--no play		Accept	Accept	Reject	Accept	Accept	Accept
17. Evaluating grade retention		Accept	Reject				
18. Comparing test-taking strategies		Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept		
19. Assessing study skills behavior		Reject					
20. Dissatisfaction theory		Reject	Reject	Reject			

On the next page, Figure 1 shows the percentage of external reviewers who disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to accept a document -- the percent of reviewers who would have rejected a document ERIC/TM accepted. As the figure shows, only three documents out of 20 had a disagreement rate higher than 66%.

Figure 1: Percent of external reviewer--ERIC/TM disagreement regarding documents that ERIC/TM accepted.

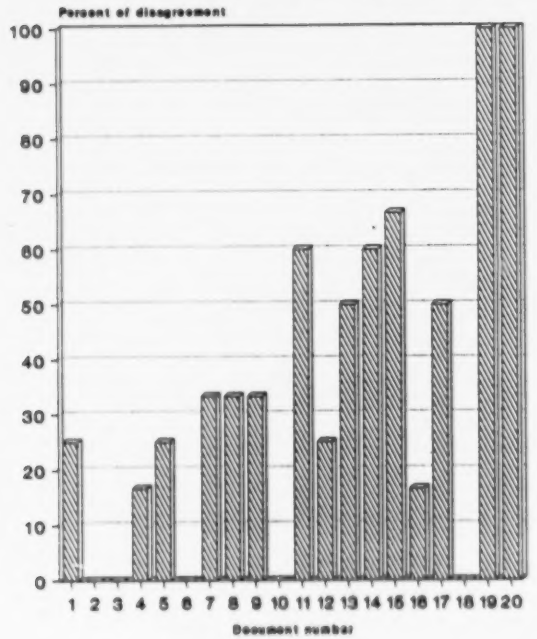

Figure 2: Percent of external reviewer--ERIC/TM disagreement regarding documents that ERIC/TM rejected.

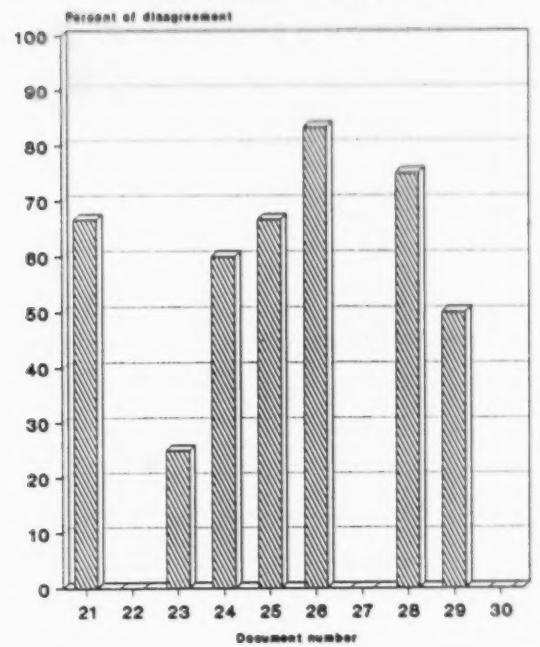

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Table 3 shows the agreement rates for individual documents that ERIC/TM rejected. This table shows that there were no instances in which all external reviewers of a document disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to reject that document. In contrast, there were three instances in which all external reviewers of a document agreed with ERIC/TM's decision to reject the document.

Table 3: Comparison of ERIC/TM's rejected documents with external review decisions

Short Titles of Documents ERIC/TM Rejected	Reviewer	External Reviewer Decisions 1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Chicago test scores, 1986		Accept	Reject	Accept			
22. Cooperative research in schools		Reject	Reject	Reject			
23. Dev. military proficiency		Reject	Accept	Reject	Reject		
24. Eval. of Phys.Ed. pilot program		Reject	Accept	Accept	Accept	Reject	
25. Product design and curr. implem.		Reject	Reject	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
26. Pred. valid. of ACT assessment		Accept	Accept	Accept	Reject	Accept	Accept
27. Depres., anx., and self-efficacy		Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject		
28. Predictability of GPA at USMA		Accept	Accept	Accept	Reject		
29. Computation of GCV functions		Reject	Accept				
30. Washington statewide assessment		Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	Reject	

Figure 2 displays the percent of external reviewers who disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to reject a document. As the Figure shows, 4 of the 10 documents had a disagreement rate higher than 66%.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Inter-rater Agreement: One of ERIC/TM's goals is to accept documents into the database that interest a wide audience within the educational community, while also not overloading the database with documents that are of little value to this community. ERIC/TM views the overall agreement rate of 66 percent as an indication that it is achieving this goal. This relatively high rate of agreement suggests that ERIC/TM's review process is reliable and appropriate. This conclusion is especially noteworthy considering the varied specialties of the external reviewers and the similar agreement rate reported by Eissenberg and Rudner (1988).

The Individual Document Agreement Rate: The agreement rates between ERIC/TM and the external reviewers suggest that ERIC/TM is reviewing and accepting documents in a manner that is consistent with the expectations of the educational community. However, ERIC/TM also examined some of the *critical incidents of disagreement* regarding individual documents to identify where it can improve the review process.

In this evaluation, a critical incident of disagreement occurs when more than 66% of the external reviewers disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to accept or reject a particular document. Eissenberg and Rudner (1988) defined a critical incident of disagreement as a document that provoked 100% disagreement and reported eight such incidents. This stricter definition can be attributed to the fact that in most cases (28 of 40) only one or two external reviewers examined a document. In the present study, there were seven cases in which 67% (or more) of the reviewers disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision about a document, and in most cases (26 of 30), three or more external reviewers examined a document.

In three cases, at least 67% of the external reviewers rejected documents that ERIC/TM had accepted, though one of these documents was reviewed only by a single external reviewer, and thus there is little basis for discussion. In four cases, at least 67% of the reviewers accepted documents that ERIC/TM had rejected. Several conclusions can be drawn from examining the individual cases presented by these two types of disagreement.

ERIC/TM accepts, external reviewers reject: There were three cases in which at least 67% of the external reviewers disagreed with ERIC/TM's decision to accept a document. One of these three cases, document number 19, had only one external reviewer. Since one external reviewer is not a meaningful two-thirds majority, we will not discuss this document further. However, the other two cases were reviewed by three external reviewers, and thus deserve closer examination.

Document 20 was reviewed by three external reviewers, and they all would have rejected the document. One of the external reviewers described the document as "a study of a particular hypothesis in the 'sociology of education' -- why school board members are defeated in elections." As such, though the methodology and presentation were adequate, the document was not relevant to ERIC/TM. This opinion was supported by the other two reviewers who commented "Irrelevant to ERIC/TM" and "Wrong ERIC."

When ERIC/TM accepted this document, it was because the document was relevant to the field of education and to the educational community. Furthermore, the document represented an attempt to extend a statistical model related to school board election results. Since no clearinghouse seemed to have a direct claim on this document and since the document might appeal to the greater ERIC audience as well as to some educational statisticians, ERIC/TM chose to accept it. The unanimous decision of our evaluators suggested that we may have overstepped our scope of interest (but see the discussion of document 25 below for a counterpoint).

The case of the other document that our reviewers rejected is not so clear cut. The document is a technical discussion of a modification of a procedure for assessing latent trait unidimensionality. The three reviewers commented:

> Unless this sort of paper is carefully reviewed by one familiar with the technical notation it can lead to incorrect applications. Therefore, I think it should be submitted for publication to a technical journal such as *Psychometrika* rather than to be included in ERIC. It is not likely to be of interest or useful to ERIC users. (Reject)
>
> Terrible presentation. It reads like a TV writers stereotype of computer output . . . . (Reject)

Although in an almost outline form, the paper gets to the substance of the matter and is clear to follow. (Accept)

Because of the detailed statistical content, this document was eventually reviewed by ERIC/TM's director. Most technical documents, such as number 29 (rejected), receive extra attention precisely for the reason noted by the first reviewer. However, statistical documents are of interest to some members of the measurement community and, thus, will interest some of ERIC/TM's audience. Therefore, statistical documents **that contribute significantly to the field of educational measurement** will be included in the ERIC database. At least one of our reviewers (the third) and possibly another (the first) believe that this document makes such a contribution.

ERIC/TM rejects, external reviewers accept: At least 67% of the external reviewers decided that ERIC/TM should have accepted four documents that it rejected. The first of these, document 20, was a report of Fall, 1986 test scores for selected high schools in the Chicago Public Schools. One reviewer noted the limited interest of this document, but felt that it should be accepted because it described results by school. Another reviewer commented that ERIC seemed a fitting place for school district test reports.

ERIC/TM receives many such school district reports, more than would be of use to most ERIC users. Rather than not accepting any of these reports, ERIC/TM tries to accept reports that contain meaningful descriptive text, not table after table. We believe that our audience is better served by reports that discuss results in some depth. While this document does contain some descriptive text, ERIC/TM agrees with the document's third reviewer who found the document inadequate in terms of relevance and effectiveness of presentation. When a group of district scores are reported in an exceptional manner, in terms of presentation, conclusions, and summaries, ERIC/TM accepts such a report. Interestingly, Eissenberg and Rudner (1988) reported that a report of state scores that ERIC/TM accepted was rejected by both of its external reviewers.

Another critical incident of disagreement, document 25, is a description of curriculum implementation in The Netherlands. While two reviewers agreed with

ERIC/TM and rejected the document, four chose to accept it. While one reviewer found the document a "first class overview," the comments of the other three reveal that their choice was not so clear:

> My first reaction was to conclude that this report . . . did not belong to ERIC/TM. Then I found there is no ERIC center that concentrates on general curriculum issues . . .
>
> Marginal call; after a good brief review and a strong argument for observational data, the author peters out; he doesn't have many results to report, and he leaves one big question . . . unanswered except for speculation.
>
> Does this belong to the TM clearinghouse's domain? I found it very hard to follow . . . However, the paper may be useful to those "in the know."

This document was not an easy one to review. Its international perspective and undeniable educational content make it a strong candidate for inclusion in the ERIC system, though possibly not as an ERIC/TM document. Since our reviewers felt that it should not have been rejected, ERIC/TM might have better served ERIC users by transferring the document to another clearinghouse. In the future, ERIC/TM will make a stronger effort not to reject a document from further consideration (by another clearinghouse) unless the document will clearly not serve the interests of the vast majority of ERIC users.

The next rejected document with at least 67% disagreement from external reviewers was a three-page discussion of the predictive validity of the ACT for various ethnic groups. This discussion was written in 1981. All the external reviewers noted this document's relevance to ERIC/TM's scope, but only one reviewer noted the age of the document. Timeliness is a major criterion that all clearinghouses consider, and ERIC/TM is no exception. This document was rejected, in part, because it is seven years old.

Age was not the only criteria that contributed to ERIC/TM's rejection however. Another consideration is document length. The *ERIC Processing Manual*, the document that describes the rules and guidelines under which an ERIC Clearinghouse operates, notes that:

> Short documents can create user problems, and their entry into . . . [ERIC] should be kept to a minimum . . . short documents selected for the ERIC system must be scrutinized with greater than ordinary care. They must be documents of high quality (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 1980, p. III-20).

This attention to document length is a criterion of the ERIC system unknown to our reviewers. Given the length of the document, then, ERIC/TM's rejection seemed acceptable. Based on our external reviewers' 83% disagreement with ERIC/TM's decision, ERIC/TM may serve its audience best by paying closer attention to the relevance of a document, and then weighing the relevance against the timeliness and the length. As one reviewer commented, "I'd accept [this document] because of [the] importance of ACT assessment and [the] continuing timeliness of the question of differential predictive validity."

The last document to be considered, number 28, was another three-page document that discussed material of a high relevance for the external reviewers and thus ERIC/TM's audience. The document discusses the stability of grade point averages at the United States Military Academy. Though this document was originally rejected because it seemed to lack sufficient content, our reviewers chose to accept it. Again, ERIC/TM might better serve its audience by paying more attention to document content and less to document content and document size.

Summary: Given ERIC/TM's audience of "researchers, state and federal policymakers, local decisionmakers, practitioners, curriculum and test developers, and consumers" (Rudner & Wise, 1989, p. 12), ERIC/TM will not always be able to please every one when it applies a selective review process. However, the results of this and earlier evaluations of the selection process indicate that, generally, ERIC/TM is pleasing most of its audience most of the time.

Of course, improvements can be made in ERIC/TM's selection process. This evaluation shows that ERIC/TM should be sure to

- try to transfer quality documents that are not clearly in any clearinghouse's scope, rather than rejecting these documents
- First judge the relevance of a document and then weigh that judgment against the document's timeliness or length

The interests and needs of ERIC/TM's audience will evolve and grow, just as the various fields in education evolve and grow. ERIC/TM will need to continually evaluate its review process in order to ensure that it can serve the changing needs of its audiences.

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Appendix A: ERIC/TM Document Review Form

ERIC/TM Document Review

Reviewer _____ Date: _____

Author:

Short Title:

Review Criteria

		Good	Adequate	Inadequate
1.	Relevance/timeliness	_____	_____	_____
2.	Methodology	_____	_____	_____
3.	Effectiveness of presentation	_____	_____	_____
4.	Other (optional) Specify:	_____	_____	_____

Comments:

Recommendation:

_____ Accept _____ Reject

Appendix B: ERIC/TM's Brief Description of Review Criteria

ERIC/TM Document Review Criteria

Every document acquired by the ERIC system is carefully reviewed by an ERIC clearinghouse for technical and content merit. Judging document content is the most important and demanding part of this review process.

At the ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evalutaion (ERIC/TM), we accept and process only documents that have a high potential for making a contribution to the field of educational measurement. We judge documents' contribution to educational measurement by examining their

- relevance and timeliness
- methodology
- effectiveness of presentation

There are two main reasons for following a careful review procedure:

1. The ERIC database is most useful to its users if it contains only the most relevant educational research

2. The ERIC database is most cost effective when clearinghouses process only the most relevant documents.

Relevance and Timeliness

ERIC/TM accepts into the ERIC database only documents that contribute new information to the field of educational measurement. If the document contributes to another field of education, we transfer the document to the appropriate clearinghouse. When documents clearly do not make a contribution, ERIC/TM rejects them.

When judging a document's relevance and timeliness we ask questions such as

Does the document address a concern of the measurement community?
Is the document on the edge of measurement research?
Does the document discuss a past measurement issue in a new light?

Methodology

We judge the methodology described in a document by examining the document's

- objectives
- research procedures
- conclusions and recommendations

We can often judge research reports based on all three of these criteria. Other documents, for example position papers, may contribute heavily in only one or two of these criteria.

Some questions that we ask when we review a document's contribution are:

Does the document meet its objectives?
Are the document's research procedures sound?
Are the conclusions justified?

Effectiveness of Presentation

We also judge documents based on their effectiveness of presentation. This criterion includes:

- clarity of language
- writing style
- audience
- cohesiveness

While presentation quality may vary, we strive to accept those that are clearly written and easy to follow.

Some questions we ask when we judge the effectiveness of a document's presentation are:

Are terms clearly defined where necessary?
Are explanations in the document easy to understand?
Does the document address its audience?
Does the document flow logically?

Do We Use Other Criteria to Review Documents?

Of course, our three major criteria are not the only criteria we use when we review documents. We also examine each document for

- new applications of knowledge
- authority of the author
- thoroughness of reporting
- responsiveness to current priorities
- technical considerations

All of these criteria help us to achieve our goal of accepting only documents that benefit the many users of the ERIC system.